

# EMS plan saves senior tennis player

Agency covers 13 sports venues

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During the two weeks when more than 12,000 athletes over the age of 50 compete in the National Senior Games, Louisville Metro EMS will have employees on standby to handle medical emergencies.



Janice Sullivan set with her husband, John Bates, as he recovered yesterday at Norton Audubon Hospital from a heart attack on Friday. (By Jessie Halladay, The Courier-Journal)

Competitor John Bates of Townsend, Tenn., is glad those medics were on hand Friday night after he suffered a heart attack while he and his wife were practicing for a mixed-doubles tennis match.

EMS employees got to him quickly to establish an airway and use a defibrillator to shock his heart back into working, allowing Bates to tell his story yesterday from a bed at Norton Audubon Hospital.

"I hate to be the guy who tested the system, but I'm glad the system worked," said Bates, 62.

During the 16-day biennial event for seniors, EMS plans to be on standby at 13 venues for competitions in cycling, golf, racquetball, road racing, softball and other sports.

The effort is taking a great deal of planning from EMS, which has had to readjust schedules, postpone all in-service training and work with hospitals to move ambulances in and out more quickly, said Dr. Neal Richmond, EMS director.

"You are dealing with seniors," Richmond said. "We really needed dedicated units. That message came loud and clear Friday night."

## **Quick response**

Bates and his wife, Janice Sullivan, met on the tennis court at a club in Richmond, Va.

When they married in 1984, they and their entire wedding party donned 1920s tennis gear and held a Wimbledon-style reception.

On Friday, Sullivan said she thought she was watching her husband die on a tennis court.

"It was clear his heart wasn't beating and he wasn't breathing," Sullivan said

Just after her husband collapsed, two doctors -- one had been practicing nearby and the other was in the stands -- began giving Bates CPR.

Meanwhile, Justin Rutledge and Sgt. Rick Meffert heard someone yell for EMS. The two jumped from an ambulance parked nearby and saw Bates.

The fastest way to get to him was to go down the bleachers and jump a fence.

They quickly established an airway for Bates and shocked his heart to try to get it beating again.

Within four minutes, Lt. Bill Kersey had arrived with another EMS ambulance to get Bates to the hospital.

Bates would have to be shocked several more times on the way.

It would be more than 24 hours before Sullivan's husband would regain consciousness.

It was a relief, Sullivan said, when she realized he recognized her and could talk.

Bates never expected to have heart troubles, having run marathons, finished triathlons and played tennis for more than 30 years. "I've always been real active," he said.

## **Pleased with service**

The couple credits the games' organizers and EMS with the forethought to have trained medical personnel at events, even practice sessions.

"He wouldn't have lived if it had happened any other place," Sullivan said.

Phil Godfrey, president of the National Senior Games, said the safety of participants and spectators is of utmost importance in the planning of the event.

A medical protocol for having personnel at events is established nationally and then given to local organizers to execute, Godfrey said. "We know (medical emergencies) are going to happen," Godfrey said. "It can happen at almost any event. We have to be ready."

In order to cover the event, EMS is using about seven ambulances, paramedic cars and supervisor units each day. During the two-week span, about 100 units will be made available to the games.

Godfrey said he's pleased with the service EMS is providing to athletes and guests.

"Based on what happened Friday night, I feel really, really good."

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